



Senators Feinstein & Snowe Propose Bill to Provide Flexibility for International HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs

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Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) today announced legislation to strengthen international HIV prevention efforts for youth, and empower HIV/AIDS workers on the ground to design the most effective and appropriate prevention programs.

The “HIV Prevention for Youth Act,” comes in response to an April 2006 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) which documented problems with the provision of the global HIV/AIDS bill that requires at least one-third of prevention funds go to “abstinence only” programs.

“With more than 40 million people infected with HIV/AIDS around the world, and thousands more infected each day with this deadly virus, Congress should support legislation that addresses the whole prevention puzzle,” Senator Feinstein said. **“This bill gives local HIV/AIDS workers the necessary resources to implement programs that are effective in their communities. By doing so, we can achieve the goal we all share: stopping the spread of the global HIV pandemic.”**

“HIV/AIDS affects people of all walks of life and all corners of the globe. That is why I believe we must tailor our prevention efforts to meet the unique circumstances of each country and each community when combating this deadly disease,” Senator Snowe said. **“Yet according to the GAO, the rules governing our HIV/AIDS prevention funding are overly rigid, wasting essential resources and hindering our efforts to stop this global health epidemic. Our legislation corrects that by taking a multifaceted approach that supports vital abstinence programs, while allowing countries the flexibility to combat HIV/AIDS effectively.”**

The proposed legislation does three things:

- First, it expresses the sense of the Senate that sexually active youth who live in a country where HIV infection is spreading through the general population should be considered at high risk of contracting HIV and provided with information on the complete range of tools to prevent the spread of HIV.
- Second, it defines “abstinence-until-marriage” programs as those programs that place the highest, rather than exclusive, priority on encouraging individuals who have not yet married to abstain from sexual activity.
- And finally, it reserves at least one-third of funds for prevention of the sexual transmission of HIV – rather than one-third of all prevention programs – for abstinence-until marriage programs. This recognizes that HIV prevention includes many types of activities and those that target the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS, such as abstinence-until-marriage programs, are only a subset.

The legislation maintains abstinence as a critical part of the prevention effort and places no limits on “abstinence-until-marriage” programs. But because one size does not fit all, the legislation would allow teams on the ground to take into account specific needs of their countries, including cultural differences, epidemiology, population age groups, and the stage of the epidemic in designing the most effective prevention program.

According to the recent GAO report, the abstinence only current spending requirement is squeezing out available funding for other key prevention interventions. For example, some countries have had to reduce planned funding for programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission, thereby limiting services for pregnant women and their children.

The GAO also found that the spending requirement limited or reduced funding for programs directed to high-risk groups, such as sexually active youth.

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